

# THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF OHIO

IN THE MATTER OF THE PROPER  
PROCEDURES AND PROCESS FOR THE  
COMMISSION'S OPERATIONS AND  
PROCEEDINGS DURING THE DECLARED  
STATE OF EMERGENCY AND RELATED  
MATTERS.

CASE NO. 20-591-AU-UNC

## ENTRY

Entered in the Journal on March 20, 2020

### I. SUMMARY

{¶ 1} Due to the declaration of a state of emergency, the Commission directs all public utilities under its jurisdiction to suspend in-person, actual meter readings in circumstances where a meter is located inside a customer's home or similar location, as well as all other non-essential functions that may create unnecessary COVID-19 risks associated with social contact. Additionally, the Commission clarifies that requests for accounting authority or incremental cost recovery related to the emergency will be addressed in each utility's individual case by subsequent entry.

### II. DISCUSSION

{¶ 2} Pursuant to R.C. 4905.02 and 4905.03, telephone companies, electric light companies (except regional transmission organizations), heating or cooling companies, natural gas companies, pipeline companies, and water-works and sewage disposal system companies (collectively, utility companies) are public utilities and, as such, are subject to the jurisdiction of the Commission.

{¶ 3} R.C. 4909.16 provides, in part, that, in the event of an emergency, when the Commission finds it necessary to prevent injury to the business or interests of the public or of any public utility, it may temporarily alter, amend, or suspend any existing rates or schedules.

{¶ 4} Ohio Adm.Code 4901:1-10-05(I)(1) states that each electric utility shall obtain actual readings of in-service customer meters at least once each calendar year and that, in

every billing period, the electric utility shall make reasonable attempts to obtain accurate, actual readings of the energy and demand, if applicable, delivered for the billing period, except where the customer and the electric utility have agreed to other arrangements. Further, Ohio Adm.Code 4901:1-13-04(G)(1) provides that each natural gas company shall obtain actual readings of customer meters at least once every 12 months and that, at a minimum, the natural gas company shall make reasonable attempts to obtain actual readings of customer meters every other month, except where the customer and the company have agreed to other arrangements. With respect to water-works companies and sewage disposal system companies providing metered service, Ohio Adm.Code 4901:1-15-19(A) requires that each such company read customer meters at least once during a three-month period unless access to a meter is unobtainable; if access to a meter is unobtainable on a quarterly basis, each customer's meter must be read at least once per year.

{¶ 5} On March 9, 2020, the governor signed Executive Order 2020-01D (Executive Order), declaring a state of emergency in Ohio to protect the well-being of Ohioans from the dangerous effects of COVID-19. As described in the Executive Order, state agencies are required to implement procedures consistent with recommendations from the Department of Health to prevent or alleviate the public health threat associated with COVID-19. Additionally, all citizens are urged to heed the advice of the Department of Health regarding this public health emergency in order to protect their health and safety. The Executive Order was effective immediately and will remain in effect until the COVID-19 emergency no longer exists. The Department of Health is making COVID-19 information, including information on preventative measures, available via the internet at [coronavirus.ohio.gov/](https://coronavirus.ohio.gov/).

{¶ 6} Pursuant to R.C. 3701.13, the Ohio Department of Health has supervision of "all matters relating to the preservation of the life and health of the people" and the "ultimate authority in matters of quarantine and isolation." On March 12, 2020, the Director of the Ohio Department of Health issued an Order indicating that "all persons are urged to maintain social distancing (approximately six feet away from other people) whenever possible."

{¶ 7} On March 12, 2020, the Commission opened this proceeding and directed all utility companies in this state to review their disconnection procedures in light of the state of emergency. On March 13, 2020, the Commission extended its winter reconnection order through May 1, 2020, and directed all utility companies in this state to review their reconnection procedures. In the March 12, 2020, and March 13, 2020 Entries, the Commission also directed all utility companies to promptly seek any necessary approval, for the duration of the emergency, to suspend otherwise applicable disconnection or reconnection requirements that may impose a service continuity or service restoration hardship on residential and non-residential customers or create unnecessary COVID-19 risks associated with social contact. The Commission determined that such filings shall be deemed approved on an emergency basis for a period of at least 30 days effective as of the filing date or until such date as the Commission may otherwise specify, which shall not be less than 30 days.

{¶ 8} On March 17, 2020, the Commission directed all competitive retail electric service providers and competitive retail natural gas service suppliers to suspend, for all customer classes, door-to-door and in-person marketing activities in this state for the duration of the emergency, unless otherwise ordered by the Commission.

{¶ 9} At this time, the Commission finds that in-person, actual meter readings present unnecessary risks of spreading COVID-19 to the customers of the electric utilities, natural gas companies, and water-works and sewage disposal system companies. In-person, actual meter readings are, therefore, in conflict with the Governor's Executive Order and the March 12, 2020 Order of the Director of the Ohio Department of Health. Accordingly, the Commission directs all electric utilities, natural gas companies, and water-works and sewage disposal system companies in this state to suspend immediately all in-person, actual meter readings for any purpose, including actual meter readings to initiate or terminate service, in circumstances where a meter is located inside a customer's home or similar location that may create unnecessary COVID-19 risks associated with social contact.

This suspension should continue for the duration of the emergency, unless otherwise ordered by the Commission.

{¶ 10} The Commission has now taken steps to ensure that in-person meter readings, as well as door-to-door solicitation and other in-person marketing activities by competitive retail electric and natural gas service providers, are suspended for the duration of the emergency. We note, however, that the utility companies in this state routinely undertake other activities on customer premises or in locations that may require or cause in-person contact. At this time, consistent with the Executive Order and the March 12, 2020 Order of the Director of the Ohio Department of Health, the Commission directs all utility companies in this state to suspend, for the duration of the emergency, any non-essential functions that would require or cause in-person contact that may create unnecessary COVID-19 spread risks, unless otherwise directed by the Commission. Such non-essential functions include, but are not limited to, in-home energy efficiency audits, weatherization programs, in-premises inspections not prompted by an identified safety-related concern, and other similar initiatives. Functions that are necessary to initiate new service where service is not presently available or to ensure the continuity of service should be deemed essential and should continue during the state of emergency, although we encourage the utility companies in carrying out their essential functions to take appropriate social distancing and other measures to protect against the spread of COVID-19. Further, nothing in this Entry is intended to inhibit utilities from continuing to comply with their obligation to furnish and maintain necessary and adequate service and facilities under R.C. 4905.22.

{¶ 11} Accordingly, all utility companies should promptly seek any necessary approval, for the duration of the emergency, to suspend otherwise applicable requirements related to their non-essential functions that may create unnecessary COVID-19 risks associated with social contact. All such filings by the utility companies shall be deemed approved on an emergency basis for a period of at least 30 days effective as of the filing date or until such date as the Commission may otherwise specify, which shall not be less than 30 days.

{¶ 12} Although the Commission recognizes that its jurisdiction generally does not extend to those utilities owned or operated by municipalities or cooperatives, the Commission urges such entities to consider a similar suspension of their non-essential functions that may create unnecessary COVID-19 spread risks.

{¶ 13} Finally, the Commission appreciates the efforts of utilities to make filings seeking authorizations or approvals that are directly responsive to orders issued in this case. However, we would clarify that the automatic approval available to proposals that are directly responsive to such orders does not apply or extend to requests for accounting authority or incremental cost recovery. The Commission will address such requests in each individual case by subsequent entry.

### III. ORDER

{¶ 14} It is, therefore,

{¶ 15} ORDERED, That, in accordance with Paragraph 9, the electric utilities, natural gas companies, and water-works and sewage disposal system companies in this state immediately suspend all actual meter readings that involve in-home, in-person contact for the duration of the emergency, unless otherwise ordered by the Commission. It is, further,

{¶ 16} ORDERED, That, in accordance with Paragraphs 10 and 11, the utility companies in this state immediately suspend any non-essential functions that would require in-person contact that may create unnecessary COVID-19 spread risks for the duration of the emergency, unless otherwise ordered by the Commission. It is, further,

{¶ 17} ORDERED, That requests for accounting authority or incremental cost recovery related to the emergency be addressed in each individual case by subsequent entry, consistent with Paragraph 13. It is, further,

{¶ 18} ORDERED, That notice of this Entry be served via the Electric-Energy, Gas-Pipeline, Railroad, Telephone, Transportation, and Water industry service lists.

COMMISSIONERS:

*Approving:*

Sam Randazzo, Chairman

M. Beth Trombold

Lawrence K. Friedeman

Daniel R. Conway

Dennis P. Deters

SJP/mef

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Summary: Entry directing all public utilities under its jurisdiction to suspend in-person, actual meter readings in circumstances where a meter is located inside a customer's home or similar location, as well as all other non-essential functions that may create unnecessary COVID-19 risks associated with social contact. Additionally, the Commission clarifies that requests for accounting authority or incremental cost recovery related to the emergency will be addressed in each utility's individual case by subsequent entry. electronically filed by Ms. Mary E Fischer on behalf of Public Utilities Commission of Ohio